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Special Crops Product Team - Report Card to Industry

I Economics and Marketing

- ▶ Published a directory of the special crops industry.
- ▶ Created three Ropin' the Web Internet Web Boards to assist industry in marketing products by bringing buyers and sellers together.
- ▶ Promptly respond to questions posted on the Web Boards and Ropin' the Web e-mail.
- ▶ Special Crops Product Team (SCPT) and the Crop Diversification Centre (CDC) North provided assistance to Alberta New Crops Network Society (ANCNS). SCPT provided funds to print 3000 brochures.
- ▶ Publish a quarterly newsletter and distribute it throughout Alberta.
- ▶ Provide price information on specialty crops to the industry.
- ▶ Work underway to develop costs of production and crop budgets for new and emerging special crops.

II Production and Research

- ▶ New integrated management weed scientist to be hired for horticulture and special crops in Brooks.
- ▶ New special crops agronomist to be hired at Brooks.
- ▶ New crops agronomist to be hired at the Beaverlodge Research Station.
- ▶ New pulse crops production manual has been produced by Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development (AAFRD).
- ▶ Herb and Spice CD-ROM produced.
- ▶ An investment of approximately \$170,000 has been made in the New Crop Development Unit (combine, no-till seeder, etc.) in the past fiscal year to provide the capability to answer important research questions.
- ▶ Mr. Ken Lopetinsky has now come under the activities of the New Crop Development Unit at

CDC North with responsibilities as Provincial Pulse Agronomist.

- ▶ Printing and distribution of two "Agri Fax" publications in partnership with Alberta Research Council (ARC).
- ▶ Expertise and financial support provided for publication of "Ag-Venture Profiles" on hemp and medicinal herbs in cooperation with AAFRD's Regional Advisory Services Division.

III Value-added and Processing

- ▶ Provincial pulse and special crops team working on "New Crops Initiative" to provide a decision system for evaluation of new crops.
- ▶ Initiated "pea butter" development in conjunction with AAFRD's Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc.
- ▶ Initiated discussions with Alberta Pulse Growers Commission on new federal pulse quality initiative.
- ▶ A direct result of the Special Crops Conference was discussions about further processing of hemp fibre and the initiation of a small research project with ARC to pulp hemp fibre and hurd for use in board products.
- ▶ Support to ANCNS on the equipment development, training and coordination of new mobile distillation unit for essential oils in the province.
- ▶ Research on the substitution of pulse protein for new aquaculture diets.

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The Newsletter is also available on the Internet at:
<http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/crops/special/scnews/index.html>

IV Policy Development and Regulations

- ▶ Planned and implemented changes in the team's consultation process with industry.
- ▶ Lobbied the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to expand the crop insurance programs to include special crops.
- ▶ Provision of input to the Alberta Grain Commission to ensure that the Prairie Grain Advance Payment Act includes special crops.
- ▶ Strategic plan sent to clients and stakeholders for review and input and to inform them of our operational plan recommendations.
- ▶ Team key results are sent to clients and stakeholders annually.

V Projects and Special Events

- ▶ Support for a series of crop diversification workshops held in winter 2000 in partnership with the PFRA.
- ▶ The SCPT will be involved with Herbs2000 and HerbFest in Saskatoon in July, both as sponsors and speakers.
- ▶ A partnership with government and industry in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia for the organization of the Western Canadian Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Conference. This conference rotates among the four western provinces and will be held in Alberta again in 2001.
- ▶ The SCPT has partnered with the University of Alberta and CV Technologies Inc. to create the "AAFRD Special Crops Product Team/CV Technologies Inc. Special Crops Scholarship" to benefit students with an interest in special crops.
- ▶ Sponsor of "Go Organic" Conference in Edmonton, March 13 and 14, 2000.
- ▶ Established the "Industry Recognition Award" to honor those who have made significant contributions to the Special Crops Industry (first award to be presented May, 2000).

Direct comments on this report card and any suggestions on how the SCPT can assist the industry to: Dr. Stanford Blade, Director
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US Perspectives on the Indian Market for Pulses & Canadian Competition

The following, adapted from a recent US Department of Agriculture article¹, is interesting, not only because it provides information on the Indian market, but also because it provides a US perspective on Canadian competition.

India: A Case for Quantity?

Pulses, such as beans, lentils and chickpeas, are the "meat" of India's main source of protein for most of its 1 billion people. India's huge and growing demand for pulses has created an import market of 700,000 tons despite the fact that it remains the world's largest producer.

The US market share, however, is only 2 per cent and falling, while Canadian sales rose from 73,000 tons in 1996 to about 220,000 last year. A US agricultural counselor in New Delhi, India, says the reason is simple: Canada offers lower quality, but affordable pulses.

Indian importers acknowledge that US peas are superior to Canadian and other origins due to their stricter grading and more sophisticated processing, but insist that the market for premium-priced, individually packaged peas is tiny and likely to remain so. Indian buyers point out that the US has more consistent growing conditions than Canada and prices of competing crops are low in both countries. If Canada can expand its acreage and production and offer a "medium-quality" product in bulk, why can't the US?

Pete Johnstone, president and CEO of Spokane Seed Company, answers that question in two words: "size matters. For every million acres Canada can put in dry peas, the US can only plant about 100,000. This vast amount of land lets Canada trade in dried peas like a bulk commodity-the same way the US can trade in wheat, rice and corn."

Johnstone says the only way he envisions the US regaining the Indian bulk pea market is if Canada changed its crop mix to one or more focused on cereals. He does not expect that will happen soon. Wheat and other cereal grains are low-priced right

¹Lee, Jill, "US Pulses Have Potential in India" AgExporter Magazine, USDA, April 2000

now. And, even if US farmers produced bargain peas, the exchange rate would still favor the Canadians.

One way for American producers to reach low-cost bulk consumers is through a new crop variety. "It's a new lentil variety called Pardina-the smallest, and currently, the least expensive lentil grown on the planet, said Johnstone. "It's doing well in Spain and the Mediterranean region. Actually, it is based on a Spanish variety. The thing is, Pardina is specifically adapted to growing conditions in the United States. You can't grow Pardina in Canada-or anywhere else." Pardina differs from most lentils. It is grey in color, and a little smaller than an average lentil.

India: A Market With A Future

There's every indication that this huge market for pulses will continue to grow. Not only is India's population increasing by 18 million per year, but production of pulses has languished as government research and price supports have favored cereal grains over other foodstuffs. As a result, per capita availability of pulses has fallen to just 38 grams per day, one-half the level of the early 1960's.

In India, consumers chose different types of pulses, based on tastes or cooking practices in the different parts of the country.

In the North: Chickpeas and products are popular. Chickpea flour is used to prepare various snack foods. Kidney beans (rajmah) and black-eyed beans (lobia) also are popular in this region.

In the South: Pigeon peas and urd, also known as black matpe, are popular here. Mung bean flour forms several snack items such as bari, spiced balls of ground pulses.

Throughout India: Peas are cooked and eaten as snack foods or used as fillers in traditional snacks such as samosas. Split yellow peas and pea flour are increasingly being blended with similar looking, but more expensive, split chickpeas and flour. Lentil are generally served along with rice as dal. Dal, garnished with onions and spices, is an indispensable entree in roadside dhabas (quick, cheap eateries). Dal also is found on menus of five-star hotels.

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Canadian Grain Commission - New Pulse Research Program

In response to the needs of both producers and the pulse industry, the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) has added a pulse research scientist, Ning Wang, PhD, to the new pulse research program at the Grain Research Laboratory (GRL).

"This is an important new initiative for the CGC that will provide research to support improved quality standards for Canadian pulse crops," said Bill Scowcroft, director of the GRL.

Wang will primarily focus on the development of internationally accepted methods for establishing quality standards for Canadian pulse crops. There are currently no standardized methods worldwide for evaluating end-use quality of pulses. Of particular importance will be the development of methods for evaluating pulse cooking quality.

Wang will also concentrate on developing methods and instrument specifications for end-use processing, such as de-hulling, of pulse crops. In addition, he will participate in the development of a Canadian pulse database which will include information on the chemical composition as well as the nutritional and functional characteristics of Canadian pulses. He will work closely with Pulse Canada as well as with pulse-related organizations in other countries such as Australia and the USA.

Wang comes to the CGC from the department of applied microbiology and food science, University of Saskatchewan, where he held the position of professional research associate. There, Wang managed pulse research projects involving quality evaluation and end-use processing, mainly of field peas and chickpeas. He also provided technical assistance and advice to the food processing industry in Saskatchewan.

Wang has an MSc and PhD from the department of food science and technology, University of Reading, U.K.

Pulse production has increased significantly in western Canada over the past several years. Canada is the world leader in pea and lentil exports with chickpea and bean exports on the rise. Rotational benefits, return per acre, minimal fertilizer requirements and contract prices have all played a role in the attractiveness of pulse crops to producers.

The CGC is the federal agency responsible for establishing and maintaining Canada's grain quality standards. Its programs result in shipments of grain that consistently meet contract specifications for quality, safety and quantity. The CGC regulates the grain industry to protect producers' rights and ensure the integrity of grain transactions.

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Sixty-five and Going Strong

The year 2000 marks the 65th anniversary of the Crop Diversification Centre South (CDCS) as a part of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. During this time the Centre has and continues to support the development of the commercial horticulture and special crops industries in Alberta.

The development of the Crop Diversification Centre South began as far back as 1903. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) owned more than three million acres of semi-arid short grass prairie in a block between Calgary and Medicine Hat. To meet its full potential the CPR knew that irrigation was a must. The CPR undertook the development of the irrigation systems which farmers in this part of the province still use today.

As part of the CPR's strategy to bring settlers west, Demonstration Farms were scattered across Western Canada. These farms investigated crops which would grow under local climates and soil conditions and also promoted and provided education on the practices of diversified farming. The aim was to show settlers that mixed farming offered a better living than straight grain farming.

The CPR Demonstration site in Brooks became the Headquarters Farm in 1918 and would later become CDCS. Under the direction of Augustus Griffin, the farm evolved into a nursery for tree production and a research center for all types of horticultural crops. Thousands of trees were propagated here and sent out to CPR stations across Alberta. Passenger train dining-car chefs favored the seasonably fruits and vegetables that were available from the farm. An inventory of the crops produced during the period of 1921-1925 reveals a wide diversity in production: 7 bean varieties, 4 pea varieties, onion seeds and 3 types of sunflowers, along with large amounts of seed grain and forage crops.

In the middle of the Great Depression, the CPR decided to suspend its involvement in irrigation, and made overtures to the Government of Alberta and the University of Alberta to take over operations of both farms. In 1935 the Alberta Government took over the operations of the new Provincial Horticultural Station.

In the late 1940's the Town of Brooks began to expand to the edges of the Provincial Horticultural Station. As a result, the Station was moved to a new (present) site in the early 1950's. It would seem that history repeated itself, as staff were faced with many of the same problems that faced Mr. Griffin some 30 years before. Over the decades shelterbelts were planted, fruit orchards were established and buildings built as the Centre evolved into the research facility it is today.

The tree fruit orchards are gone, many of the original shelterbelts have been removed and replanted, and the Centre has gone through about 3 name changes. The research remains constant. Like the people that staffed the Centre in the early days, researchers are searching for new crops or management tools to help farmers reach their full potential.

The Centre is hosting an Open House on July 28, 2000 to celebrate. Site tours begin at 9:00 a.m. followed by a program of dedications and a time to meet old friends and colleagues over coffee and cake. Mark the day on your calendar and come see what the Centre has to offer.

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Special Crops Product Team

The Special Crops Product Team represents a cross-section of specialists from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. It is a liaison between industry and government. The Team's mission is to lead departmental activities in Special Crops, consistent with industry objectives, in response to diversification, value-added and market place opportunities.

Members and phone numbers.

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